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Wise Hawks Will Support SALT Accords

Constraints on the Soviets Exceed Those on the U.S.

BY ALBERT CARNESALE

Having learned this week that a SALT II accord is to be signed in about a month, a number of American hawks have intensified the call for a massive migratory flight to a land without SALT agreements. This call resonates with the birds' natural instinct to take flight from any form of arms control. But a land without SALT II would be far less hospitable to hawks and other living creatures than one which was tempered by SALT agreements. Rather than resist ratification of SALT II, America's community of hawks should be working to bring it about.

What might it be like in a land without SALT agreements? We have no way of knowing, but reasonable estimates can be made. The Soviets for years have been devoting considerable resources to expansion of their strategic forces, and there are no signs of a letup. It is prudent to

Albert Carnesale is a professor of public policy at the Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

assume that, in the absence of SALT constraints, they would supplement their current nuclear weapons programs with some additional activities comparable to those that they pursued before the strategic arms limitation talks started.

Without SALT, the Soviet Union's nuclear arsenal would grow rapidly. The number of ICBMs (intercontinental ballistic missiles) would increase by about 250 per year. Of these, about 100 would be launchers for extremely large missiles, comparable in size to the currently deployed SS-18 ICBMs, about which the U.S. defense community expresses grave concern. And some of the additional ICBMs probably would be of the SS-16 type—a missile system that has much in common with the land-mobile SS-20 medium-range ballistic missile system now aimed at Western Europe.

All of these new Russian ICBMs would, of course, be equipped with MIRVs (multiple independently targeted reentry vehicles). It is likely that the Soviets would also increase the number of MIRVed warheads on some of their existing types of ICBMs. For example, each SS-18 missile could be loaded with 30 warheads rather than the 10 it now holds. And it would not be surprising if, in addition, the Soviets tested and deployed new types of ICBMs carrying more than 10 MIRVs.

The Soviets would also be adding each year almost 100 new SLBMs (submarine-launched ballistic missiles), housed in six new nuclear-powered submarines. The total number of nuclear warheads deployed each year on the new Soviet missiles—ICBMs and SLBMs—would exceed 2,000, and it could be much higher.

The Backfire bomber, now of marginal utility against targets in the United States, could be upgraded to give it a real operational capability against us. And the production rate of Backfires could be accelerated to a level well beyond the current rate of approximately 30 planes per year.

Without a SALT II agreement limiting offensive arms, the ABM (antiballistic missile) treaty resulting from SALT I might not be able to survive. (Indeed, at SALT I the Americans told the Soviets that failure to reach a comprehensive agreement limiting offensive arms could constitute a basis for U.S. withdrawal from the ABM treaty.) Without the ABM treaty, the Soviets would be free to try to deploy a nationwide defense against American ICBMs and SLBMs.

How well could the United States keep track of Soviet strategic programs without SALT? We monitor Soviet military activities through the use of a wide variety of sophisticated intelligence-collection systems. Perhaps best known among these are the photoreconnaissance satellites with which we regularly survey the entire Soviet Union and the sensitive antennas with which we receive from afar the telemetric information (data transmitted by radio) from flight tests of Soviet missiles and aircraft. Without SALT, the Soviets would be free to use every deliberate concealment measure at their disposal to impede the effectiveness of our information-gathering devices. They could, for example, transmit by secret code all of the data from their fly tests of their strategic missiles, thereby denying to the United States valuable information about the size of

the missiles and the number of warheads.

What would the United States do without SALT? We could wring our hands, or we could choose to follow (in whole or in part) the advice of the group which has been promoting a buildup of America's military forces: the Committee on the Present Danger.

In order to restore both real and perceived strategic adequacy for the 1980s, the committee recommends: urgent attention to the survivability and endurance of our information, communications, and command and control systems; rapid deployment of an alternate basing mode for our ICBMs; development of a new and more capable ICBM; procurement of a high-quality strategic bomber and the cruise missile tanker system; acceleration of the Trident SLBM and submarine programs and renewed study and development of a smaller SLBM submarine; rehabilitation of our air-defense programs; reexamination of our civil-defense program, and reinvigoration of ABM research and development.

To those gourmets whose favorite nuclear dishes have been omitted from even this extensive menu, still more choices can be offered. For example, we could continue to improve the accuracy and increase the explosive power of the warheads on our Minuteman ICBMs; we could develop highly accurate long-range cruise missiles and deploy a couple of thousand of them on our B-52 strategic bombers; we could modernize and expand our nuclear and conventional forces in Europe, and we could transfer to our allies the sophisticated technologies required for cruise missiles and other advanced weapons.

The central question is how does this land without SALT compare to a land in which the agreements of SALT I and II are extant? The answer is remarkably (and to some, painfully) simple. Without SALT, there would be no agreed limitations, so all of the actions outlined above—American and Soviet—would be permitted. With SALT I and II, all of the American actions remain permitted, but each and every one of the Soviet actions described above would be prohibited. This is not to say that SALT would preclude every conceivable Soviet strategic program; it would not. But SALT would proscribe many plausible and potentially significant forms of Soviet military buildup.

Rejection of SALT II by the United States Senate would free the Soviets from these important constraints, yet this drastic action would not open to the United States any meaningful strategic nuclear options which otherwise would have been unavailable to us. For American hawks determined to preserve the security of our nation, the lesson should be clear: To fly away from SALT is to fly the wrong way.